

ENGLISH

# OFRENDAS

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CELEBRATING  
EL DÍA DE MUERTOS



September 24 - November 6, 2022

Special Exhibition Galleries Central

## OFRENDAS

*Día de Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, is celebrated from October 31 to November 2 in Mexico and other Latin American countries, as well as in some regions of the United States. As part of this tradition, many people create *ofrendas* (offerings)—altars to honor those who have passed away, as the dead are believed to return to visit their living relatives at this time of the year.

The DIA put out a call to artists for proposals for *ofrendas*. Submissions were judged by a committee of representatives from the DIA, the Consulate of Mexico in Detroit, and the local community. Committee members were Georgina Garcia-Pffeuffer, Jesús Gutiérrez Rodríguez, María Elena Rodríguez, Marlon Lara, Myrna Segura-Beltchenko, Nancy Barr, Raymond Lozano, and Rufino B. Lim. The wide-ranging group of artists chosen for the exhibition includes seasoned artists, teachers, art enthusiasts and entrepreneurs. Many have designed *ofrendas* for other museums, galleries, and community centers.

Discover how local artists and community members, inspired by this Mexican tradition, use their *ofrendas* to commemorate their lost loved ones.

**If you were to honor someone, who would that be?  
How would you celebrate that person's life?**



## PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

1. The Consulate of Mexico
2. Maria Elena Blanco
3. Meghan Nalian
4. Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan, La Casa Amiga, and United Auto Workers
5. Sandra Osip
6. Alberto Marín, Martha Rosales, and Carlos Landa
7. HijiN(X) (they/them)
8. Saramaria Aguilar, David Cruz, Josué Román, Leidy Vargas, Antonio Santoyo, and José García
9. Friends on Board Foundation
10. Stephanie Peña and Georgina García with Mexicantown CDC
11. Cris Rea, Araceli Escobar, Bianca Espinoza, Mónica García, Rocío Rodríguez, Gilberto Ramos, and Carlos Constantino
12. Diane Gomez Burden and Cheryl Geitman
13. Arianna Carrera with Ballet Folklórico México Lindo
14. Mexicanas en Michigan

## El Chente

**The Consulate of Mexico** ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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This ofrenda honors the legendary Mexican folk singer Vicente (“Chente”) Fernández, who passed away on December 12, 2021. He was a national icon, as well as an international authority on mariachi music. Throughout his career Chente performed to sold-out audiences across Mexico and the United States, and his music penetrated Mexican and American culture in the most profound ways, making his passing a day of tragedy for music lovers.”

The Consulate of Mexico in Detroit collaborates annually with the DIA’s ofrenda exhibitions. Established more than a hundred years ago, the Consulate of Mexico in Detroit brings together people of different cultures.

## Papi

**Maria Elena Blanco** ♦ *Farmington, Michigan*

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“My dad escaped Communist Cuba with his wife and three daughters in 1968. He taught me many life lessons by example: work hard (as he did in the factory), be resourceful (as he cultivated a garden), think creatively (as he built a shed from scrap wood), and be self-sufficient (as he taught me how to cook Cuban food). These elements of his legacy are seen in his altar.”

Maria Elena Blanco is a Cuban immigrant who was plucked out of the place she was meant to be. Creating art allows her to express her love for her culture.

## I Talk to the Wind

**Meghan Nalian** ♦ *Royal Oak, Michigan*

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My father means everything to me, and I always wanted to be just like him. Both of us artists, visiting the DIA was something we loved to do together. To honor him here, I used objects found in nature such as flowers, plants, birds, and butterflies; his crystals, stars, and religious objects and statues; photographs of him with his work and his family, and his art supplies.”

An illustrator and still-life artist with a background in counseling and art therapy, Meghan Nalian helps people love themselves and others as beautiful expressions of the universe’s creativity.

## Those Who Did Not Return Home

**Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan, La Casa Amiga, and United Auto Workers** ♦ *Pontiac, Michigan*

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“We are honoring workers who died as a result of unsafe working conditions—those who left for work and never returned home. Atop is a wood cross like the ones in makeshift memorials, which, in many cultures, mark the spot where a person died suddenly. The road symbolizes the job site but also the way back home. The boots and helmet symbolize the workers themselves.”

La Casa Amiga, a nonprofit organization in partnership with the United Auto Workers union, offers free Spanish-language work-safety training to Latin American workers to reduce job-site fatalities.

## Vanity

**Sandra Osip** ♦ *Grosse Pointe, Michigan*

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“My memorial celebrates grandmothers and things they held dear that nature has now reclaimed. These loving matriarchs uphold family traditions. My altar “vanity” represents personal items that satisfy their inner ego and help them feel positive about themselves. My memorial honors all the beautiful, caring grandmothers in every community.”

Having lost both grandmothers at a very young age, all Sandra Osip has left is memories of them, which drives her creativity, inspiration, and artwork to honor all grandmothers.

## Pre-Hispanic Ofrenda

**Arianna Carrera with Ballet Folklórico México Lindo** ♦ *Commerce Charter Township*

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Adorned with fruit, flowers, seeds, incense, water, an image of Mictlantecuhtli (god of death), and a figure of Xoloitzcuintle (Mexican hairless dog), this altar represents an Aztec pre-Hispanic offering. Xoloitzcuintles were believed to guide souls to Mictlán, the Aztec underworld. These offerings were placed around tombs to help souls reach Mictlán. The ofrenda includes a video featuring pre-Hispanic dances performed by the Ballet Folklórico México Lindo.”

Arianna Carrera, an architecture student with Mexican roots and a member of Ballet Folklórico México Lindo, designed this ofrenda, which is sponsored by the Ballet Folklórico México Lindo, a nonprofit organization promoting Mexican culture.

## JesaSang

**HijiN(X) (they/them)** ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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“Growing up, I practiced JesaSang, a Korean ceremony similar to an ofrenda. A table is set with offerings, usually food and anything the departed enjoyed. This altar honors the country that continues to fight for its sovereignty and the martyrs of the violence caused by imperialist forces, which divided and continues to divide so many families. Images are of victims of the Japanese occupation, as well as those who suffer due to the Korean War, an ongoing trauma for that society.”

HijiN(X) is an antibinary Korean immigrant driven by their disconnection and connection with the diaspora created by US imperialism and colonization.

## Ofrenda a La Doña

**Saramaria Aguilar, David Cruz, Josué Román, Leidy Vargas, Antonio Santoyo, and José García** ♦ *Warren, Michigan*

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“Our altar honors María Félix, considered the greatest diva of the golden age of Mexican cinema. Among her favorite dishes are escamoles (“ant eggs,” a delicacy in Mexico City), rice pudding, and chemita steak. The pieces of jewelry are replicas of items she collected.”

As Mexicans, we have grown up setting up altars for the dead every year as part of our culture. Abroad, we participate to honor our country and raise awareness about our traditions.

## Femicide, the Gray Consequence of Being Born a Woman in Mexico

**Friends on Board Foundation** ♦ *Troy, Michigan*

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“We honor the thousands of Mexican women murdered because of their gender. The violence, hate, and rape associated with these atrocities deprive the victims of their very essence. In a traditional altar, the bright colors joyfully honor the departed despite the sorrow of loss. But a victim of femicide, robbed of all her colors, has a gray altar. A traditional altar, but monochromatic. No colors. No joy. No peace. No justice.”

Friends on Board Foundation is a nonprofit organization that offers educational scholarships to Mexican and Mexican American women living in Michigan and promotes Mexican and Mexican American culture statewide.

## El viaje de las mariposas monarca

**Stephanie Peña and Georgina García with Mexicantown CDC** ♦ *Detroit, Michigan*

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“The annual migration of the monarch butterfly through central Mexico coincides with celebrations for Día de Muertos. Inspired by this coincidence, our altar is dedicated to the paths traversed by immigrants throughout North America, from those who take the treacherous leap to seek opportunity to the families with roots on both sides because an imaginary line dispossessed them of their land. We honor their journeys and acknowledge their contributions to our lives and to American culture.”

Mexicantown Community Development Corporation (MCDC) celebrates Mexican and Latino arts and culture by empowering artists and strengthening the communities we serve.

## Brave on the Front Line

**Cris Rea, Araceli Escobar, Bianca Espinoza, Mónica García, Rocío Rodríguez, Gilberto Ramos, and Carlos Constantino** ♦ *Dearborn, Michigan; Durango and Pénjamo, Mexico*

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“We honor frontline workers who lost their lives serving and protecting others. Working in health care, education and childcare, food and goods distribution, public safety, transportation, utilities, and cleaning services, frontline workers often receive lower wages and receive no benefits or paid sick leave. Many represent minority groups, including Hispanics and immigrants from Latin America, who have fewer educational opportunities.”

A group of Hispanic coworkers with a passion to support cultural awareness and education at work and inspire understanding, empathy, and inclusion within the community.

## Good Mourning, Mother Earth

**Diane Gomez Burden and Cheryl Geitman** ♦ *Van Buren Township, Michigan*

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“This piece was inspired by slain environmental activist Homero Gómez Gonzáles, and it honors environmentalists in Latin America murdered by those who seek profit through deforestation. My hope is that Mother Earth has embraced these individuals in her care. Trees, the canopy of nature’s cathedral, serve as a gateway for our advocates to visit. Monarch butterflies are common in ofrendas, and protecting them was the passion of Homero Gómez Gonzáles.”

A Mexican American who lives and works in the metro Detroit area, Diane spends summers camping, water coloring in the woods, and dreaming under the stars with her mom, Cheryl.

## Mitla “Lugar de los Muertos”

**Alberto Marín, Martha Rosales, and Carlos Landa** ♦ *Grand Rapids, Michigan*

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“Inspired by the artist Francisco Toledo, this altar explores the symbology and ornamental architecture of the Mixtec civilization. The statue of Coatlicue, the earth-mother goddess, represents the ancient to what already was but also to what gives life, that is, the earth. Behind the sculpture are images of animals, each one personifying a constellation of stars, which, in pre-Hispanic culture, were paths to distant worlds.”

Visual artist Alberto Marín, designer Martha Rosales, and papel picado artist Carlos Landa belong to Michigan Collective Multidisciplinary Project, an organization that helps young artists from Mexico further their artistic growth in the United States.

## Covid—Grief from a Distance

**Mexicanas en Michigan** ♦ *Novi, Michigan*

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“This piece honors the many people who died during the COVID-19 pandemic, depicting the loneliness they experienced and the anguish of families unable to be at their side in their final moments. Electronic screens displayed in front of our loved ones’ pictures symbolize the last time we saw, listened to, or spoke with them.”

A group of Mexican women who live in Michigan and love to promote their culture within their neighborhoods. This group was created 10 years ago to share experiences among Mexican women who live in Michigan.